

THE DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND OF
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was welcomed warmly by the Chancellor, politely by the Kaiser, and coldly by Tirpitz, and the discussions were continued in London after his return. Once again, however, the difficulties proved insurmountable. So far from being prepared to reduce her naval programme Germany had decided on a substantial increase, and the British Government would only undertake neither to make nor to join in an unprovoked attack. A promise of neutrality would alienate France, and in any case we could not consent to tie our hands ; for Germany might conceivably use Austria to unleash a war and then demand that we should stand aside. Yet the Haldane Mission was not wholly in vain. Though no more was heard of naval limitation or neutrality formulas, amicable and successful negotiations concerning the Bagdad railway and spheres of influence in the Portuguese colonies filled the next two years. Grey and Bethmann trusted each other, for they both desired the preservation of peace ; and Lichnowsky, the new German Ambassador in London, laboured gallantly to rebuild the bridges. The attempt of Germany to extract a promise of neutrality, or indeed any written declaration likely to fetter our action, was watched with deep suspicion by France, who hailed the failure of the discussions with relief. Poincare, however, who throughout 1912 combined the offices of Premier and Foreign Minister, feared that the temptation might one day be renewed. An alliance, he realized, was impossible, but the near approach of war in 1911 made further advances practicable. The so-called Mediterranean agreement, by which England recalled part of her fleet to home waters and France transferred her battleships from the Channel and Atlantic, was the result of independent Admiralty decisions in both countries,

and the consequential technical agreements involved no obligation of armed support. Yet facts spoke louder than formulas. When France left two of her three coasts exposed, and when we no longer depended entirely on our own strength in the Mediterranean, the conclusion seemed inescapable that we were allies in everything but name. At the suggestion of the French the situation was defined in the letters exchanged by Grey and Paul Cambon on November 22 and 23, 1912, which registered the unfettered freedom of both countries to decide their course but bound us to consult one another in case of need. The formula of consultation, in Grey's eyes, merely recognized existing facts : to the more logical French mind, with its craving for the written word, it was a definite and